Embryo Donation
We often talk about IVF being the “last step” in the fertility treatment journey. In terms of actual treatment techniques, that is true. In terms of the patient journey – IVF might actually be the first step of an entirely new journey – and it this new journey includes the use of donated embryos for subsequent IVF cycles.

In many cases, the process of IVF winds up yielding another layer of critical information about a couple’s infertility factors – things that weren’t available for discovery without embryonic information. A couple’s embryos may wind up telling us things like, “there are chromosomal abnormalities here,” or “We contain genes for a genetic defect that makes full-term pregnancy or a healthy live birth less promising.” These defects may be the result of bad chromosomal or genetic material contained in the sperm and/or egg, or it could be related to poor maternal egg quality and/or poor sperm quality.

Outside of embryonic issues, the modern family has expanded the possibilities for using donated embryos. These include single women, 35-years or older who want
to have a baby and would rather move straight to the highest possible chance of IVF success, or members of the *LGBTQ+ community* who opt to use donor embryos for any number of reasons.

When these or other issues come to light, embryo donation can be an amazing solution to a heart wrenching problem. In one fell swoop, you get to say, “Yes!” to the idea pregnancy, labor, delivery and breastfeeding – all of which are impossible if you go the traditional adoption route. Plus, you also get to help another couple rest easier knowing their extra embryos are being used to help other couples who have faced the same struggles they have. Or, perhaps an egg donor will be satisfied to know that her healthy genetic material was put to invaluable use – one of her ultimate goals all along.

If you’ve experienced repeat failed miscarriages via IVF cycles - or have been handed an infertility diagnosis that indicates pregnancy via your own embryos is not a likely reality – consider learning more about embryo donation. It truly is a gift that leaves a lasting legacy for you, your partner and your growing family.
Use High-Quality Embryos to Conceive Your Baby

First, it’s important to note that not all embryos are created equal, and not all embryo donation centers are as diligent as others when it comes to using the highest-quality embryos available.

Here at Columbia Fertility Associates (CFA), we are diligent about the quality of the donated embryos we transfer into our patients’ wombs. This is the only way to do all we can to provide a healthy full-term baby at the end of the IVF road. We back up the quality of the donor embryos we transfer in several ways:

**Using Embryos Made From Donor Eggs.** Egg donors go through a meticulous screening process – physically, mentally and emotionally. They must also fall into very stringent age brackets, since we all know that the age of the egg is directly related to IVF success rates. In most cases, young and healthy donors end up producing a plethora of eggs, all of which may be used to create very viable embryos. As a result, embryos made from donor eggs are highly sought after for embryo adoption.
2. **Using Embryos Fertilized Here at CFA.** In a very loose way, trusting donor embryos from another clinic would like trusting a relative stranger to submit a cake they made under your name at a baking contest. Obviously, the stakes are infinitely higher in the case of donor embryos, but the basic tenet remains the same. ***In rare cases we do accept embryos from outside clinics, and only after a review of their cycle and embryo development by one of our physicians. Those donors then undergo the same screening steps as donors who created their embryos here at CFA. We know that we use the best techniques available to create embryos, we employ equally superb protocols when it comes to vitrifying (specialized freezing) those eggs, and similarly impeccable techniques when thawing the embryos for IVF transfer. By using donor embryos that were created here in our own state-of-the-art embryology lab, CFA has complete control over the process from start to finish.

3. **Control Over Freezing and Thawing.** If clients have embryos sent from another lab, we never know for sure about the scenarios surrounding the embryos’ freezing, thawing and mid-shipment experiences. When we are the
ones responsible for freezing and thawing the embryos – no intra-or inter-state transportation required – we feel much more comfortable. Even the smallest error in any part of the process can have a negative effect on embryo quality. ***In the rare case the embryos did come from a different clinic, it is noted on the profile associated with the donated embryos so patients are aware the embryos have traveled from an outside clinic.

If you do opt to have your embryos shipped from an embryo donation agency to your fertility clinic of choice, we recommend choosing the supplying agency very carefully. Excluding the actual identities of the egg/sperm donors (which would be provided to you if you opt to do an open embryo adoption), you should be given full disclosure into both parties’ age, health histories, family health histories, psychological evaluations, etc. etc. Opt for embryos made from women between the ages of 21 and 30 to ensure the best IVF rates possible.

We are always happy to refer clients to the most reputable embryo donation agencies if our stores are not sufficient for their needs at any given time.
IVF Success is Largely Dependent on Maternal Age

Currently, the average IVF success rates for couples using frozen donor embryos is 27.7%. That rate can be even higher if you are careful about the age of the woman who contributed her egg, and you pair IVF with PGD or PGS technology (more on that next).

We can’t express enough how important the maternal age of the egg donor – or embryo donor, if the embryos are donated from a couple with leftover embryos – is to your chances of IVF success. If you haven’t done so already, we encourage you to review SART’s or the CDC’s IVF success rates in terms of maternal age. There is a notable difference.

Using a donor embryo for IVF is similar in that your success rates will reflect those most similar to the age of the woman whose egg was used to create the embryo. Therefore, if you use an embryo from a woman who was not an egg donor (egg donors are typically 30-years or younger) your IVF success rates will be closer to those of women her age.
For example, an embryo made from a 35-year old’s egg has roughly a 40% chance of resulting in live birth, while an embryo made from a woman who is 43-year old has roughly a 30% chance of resulting in live birth – and the statistics drop drastically with every successive year. An unhealthy looking embryo from a 45-year old woman’s egg has less than a less than 1% chance of being successful. Bottom line – age matters!

This is why it is so important to use reputable embryo sources, and to pour over the details provided to you regarding the eggs that were used to create that embryo.
PGS or PGDS Can Ensure Embryologists Select the Healthiest-Appearing Embryo(s) For Transfer

Just to be clear, selecting the embryos doesn’t mean you are stuck with them. The embryologists at CFA always visually examine the embryos using a microscope. Only healthy embryos are stored for embryo donation. Once those embryos have been selected, we’ll examine them again.

Only the healthiest appearing embryos are used for transfer. The same will be true if you opt to use embryos from another source for IVF here at Columbia Fertility Associates; our embryologist will examine the embryos to ensure they meet the visual criteria.

However, much of what determines “embryonic health” lies in the chromosomes and DNA. To assess those components, we have to use PGS or PGD. If you choose to use donor embryos, these tests can help to safeguard you from transferring an embryo that has chromosomal abnormalities OR that has one of the most common genetic birth defects. Understand the embryos would have to be thawed, refrozen and then thawed again when undergoing PGS or PGD testing which may have
an effect on the embryos. In some cases PGS or PGD testing had already been performed on the embryos at the time they were created, so that information will also be available within the profile for the donor.

We know that the large majority of miscarriages are the result of chromosomal or genetic abnormalities, so testing beforehand can save a tremendous amount of emotional stress and grief at the backend, not to mention your financial resources. There is an additional cost attached to these tests (typically $3000 to $5000, depending on the clinic), but this extra cost has potentially priceless benefits.

Embryo Donation is Completely Anonymous (Unless You Prefer an Open Adoption)

If you want an open adoption, there is the possibility that you can have one, depending on the wishes of the embryo donors. In most cases, embryo adoption is completely anonymous.

As we mentioned above, you should be able to obtain significant details about the egg donor, including medical history and perhaps even interests, talents and hobbies. You may also have detailed information about the sperm donor.
However, you will only receive information about the embryo donors’ identities if they are open to an open embryo adoption.

You’ll notice that there are two different, but interchangeable, terms floating around in this eBook – embryo donation and embryo adoption. These are basically one and the same because when someone donates embryos, they legally relinquish their parental rights to the baby that is eventually born. Similarly, the individual or couple who adopts the donated embryo will go through a legal process similar to those who adopt a child, ensuring that you have full parental rights to the embryo and the baby from that point forward.

One of the bonuses of adopting an embryo, rather than a child, is that your names are automatically written on the birth certificate when your baby is born. This is different from the typical adoption process, where the biological mother/father’s names are entered at the time of birth, and then legally changed later on (usually not for at least one calendar year or longer, depending on the situation and the laws in that state).

When you adopt an embryo, and become pregnant via IVF, nobody but your fertility clinic and those you want to tell ever have to know your baby was created using an egg and sperm from others. That includes your OB if you’d rather not have him or her know all the details. You will be the only parents the baby will ever know – both legally and from the heart.
The Basic Embryo Donation-Adoption Process

There are certain steps you and the donating parent(s) will have to complete to make the embryo adoption official.

**Medical Screening.** The FDA actually requires that embryo donors go through a medical screening and paperwork process. This process provides information about things like ethnicity, disease history, etc. This step is mandatory in order to meet FDA guidelines. If the embryo was created by donor egg and donor sperm, this information will be supplied by the relevant clinics.

**Counseling.** It is also required that both couples go to a fertility counselor for a set number of sessions to ensure they are mentally and emotionally prepared for the present moment, as well as potential feelings that may arise down the road. Again, this step is eliminated for embryos created by donor egg and donor sperm. The recipient couple must also go to at least one – and sometimes more – counseling sessions. These sessions will cover things such as the practical, logistical and emotional facets involved with embryo donation, if/when/how a child will be told they were the product of IVF and an embryo donation, whether or not family and friends will be told – if so, what will those conversations look like, and similar topics.
3. **Legal Paperwork.** As we mentioned in the Embryo Adoption section above, you may have a fair amount of paperwork to do and the entire process should be handled with a currently licensed and practicing lawyer. Optimally this would be a lawyer with experience in family law and embryo donation. Laws vary from state-to-state; some states have laws pertaining specifically to embryo donation and adoption; others treat embryo donation and adoption the same way they handle egg and sperm donation, others have very little on record at all. Your legal team will help you to draft the most legally sound paperwork for your state and its laws.

4. **The 90-Day Wait.** Finally, it is recommended that embryo donors wait 90-days from the time they finalize the consent form to when the embryo donation takes place to allow plenty of time for the information to process and to feel 100% confident about their choice.

This last step in the embryo donation process is worth considering if you’re currently weighing embryo donation against adopting a child. In most states, biological parents -and even other immediate family members - can come out of the woodwork for the first 365-days after you are “granted” your child. This can be absolutely heart
wrenching and we have heard our fair share of horror stories.

In the case of embryo adoption, you wait 90-days for the donor couple to officially sign off before the embryo(s) is ever transferred – securing your position as the child’s legal parent from the very beginning – with no ticking clock or potential deadline to worry about.
The Financial Side of Embryo Donation

There are costs associated with embryo adoption, all of which are related to the “business” side of things. Typical cost ranges for embryo donation – over and above the costs of IVF – range from $6000 to $8000 - more if parents elect to use PGS or PGD.

These extra costs are related to:

- Reviews of medical clearance for donors and submission of FDA documentation.
- Fertility counseling fees
- Legal paperwork and fees
- Administrative time

The cost of an embryo donation is picked up by the recipient (adopting) parent(s), and they are used cover the donor’s costs as well as their own. There is no compensation – financial or otherwise – offered to embryo donors. The majority of the donated embryos here at CFA were donated in an act of love.
Couples donate their embryos to prevent them from being thawed and discarded, or from being perpetually stored in a cryogenic state. They also feel great satisfaction and a sense of peace knowing their embryos will become part of a loving family, used to help individuals and couples who are traveling the same rough road they once traveled themselves.

Is it Time for You to Discuss the Possibility of Embryo Donation?

The birth of a baby born from a donated embryo is like a miracle to the third-degree. In most cases, it requires a tremendous amount of love, effort, grief and surrender to make that multi-fold dream a reality. However, holding that sweet baby in your arms will make you so grateful that you remained faithful to your vision.

If your IVF cycles have yet to be successful, and embryo quality seems to be the core issue, perhaps it’s time for you to consider using donor embryos. We are happy to answer your questions and to fill in extra information where needed. Contact CFA to schedule a consultation or to learn more about our donor embryos and/or the embryo donation process.
Embryo Donation

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